



## COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

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### MEMO

TO: BTC Tech Team Members  
FROM: Ken Braverman, Project Manager, CEDO, City of Burlington Vermont  
DATE: May 11, 2015  
RE: Follow-up correspondence, May 5<sup>th</sup> Meetings

Thank you so much for participating in last week's BTC Redevelopment meetings. We felt that the time spent together as a team and with the Devonwood development group was both informative and productive.

As a next step, we would like for you to prepare your thoughts, feedback and suggestions in a Peer Review Memorandum. While we would like to leverage each team members unique skill-sets and expertise, we thought that an informal template for this memo could assist the City's team in conveying the Tech Team's input in a clear and concise way to the City, DAPAC Committee and general public.

As such, I have attached a memo format with specific questions outlined. Please answer these questions with a particular focus on your area of expertise. Also, please feel free to expand on these questions with additional thoughts or insight.

To keep the public process moving along, we would like to receive your draft response no later than Friday, May 29, 2015. Please let us know if you expect any challenges in meeting that date. We expect there will be some back and forth with staff and with the DAPAC committee to review and discuss in public meeting (schedule TBD).

## *Technical Team Review Template*

### **MEMO**

TO: CEDO & Planning Departments  
FROM: Sasaki Associates  
DATE: May 26, 2015  
RE: Technical Team Peer Review – BTC Redevelopment

### **INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND:**

#### **Gina Ford, ASLA**

Gina is a landscape architect, principal, and chair of Sasaki's Urban Studio. Gina's work encompasses a wide range of scales and project types, from public parks and plazas to large-scale landscape planning and waterfront projects. She brings to each project a passion for the process of making vibrant landscape spaces—from the conceptual design to the details of implementation—with a particular focus on the life and use of urban, public environments.

#### **Eamonn Hutton**

Eamonn is a landscape architect and associate in Sasaki's Urban Studio. Eamonn contributes design, planning, and research to a variety of urban projects, including built landscapes and strategic parks master planning. He has a particular interest in the design of urban public spaces through an engaged public process and the role of technology spatial planning.

Gina and Eamonn's combined expertise will assist the technical review of public realm and landscape components of the plan, as well as the urban design of the site. Additionally, Gina and Eamonn have a history of working on planning and design projects in Burlington – in particular, they were part of the team that authored the City's Parks Master Plan. This history has given them an understanding of Burlingtonians' values related to open space and public process.

### **QUESTIONS:**

*What is your overall assessment of Devonwood's proposed plan to redevelop the BTC in light of PlanBTV and other identified municipal planning goals?*

The project addresses one of the core challenges facing downtown Burlington: the lack of affordable housing options in downtown Burlington. Recent planning documents, including the Housing Action Plan (2015), the Downtown Housing Strategy (2014), and PlanBTV (2014), recommend targeted infill housing in downtown Burlington to address the what one plan calls a "housing crisis." The nature of the plan – mixed use with high density – aligns with the goals of PlanBTV.

Increasing connectivity – by avoiding dead-ends and cul-de-sacs – is a core goal of PlanBTV. The Pine Street connection reintroduces north/south connectivity for automobiles and bikes. If this connection is well-used, it will bring more activity to Cherry Street. Supporting walkability and improving the pedestrian realm are also key goals from PlanBTV. The arcades and streetscapes have the potential to greatly increase walkability in downtown and bring civic life to a parcel that largely turns its back to the surrounding city.

PlanBTV envisions a series of stormwater strategies, called "the green machine," that perform collectively to collect, temporarily store and treat stormwater runoff. Cherry and Bank are identified in PlanBTV as potential "green streets," which would manage runoff through a series of vegetated infiltration techniques. In the proposed design, building setbacks are wide enough to integrate this strategy within the public realm. Green roofs – and their multiple environmental benefits – are a key component of the green machine. PKSB indicated that the roof parks will incorporate stormwater storage.

The rooftop green spaces are convincing as amenities for the building tenants, but less successful as public spaces. The key challenge for these spaces will be visibility. Church Street hosts many thousands of visitors every year. As it is designed currently, the roof spaces are not clearly accessible from Church St. From the perspective of a Burlington resident, the roof parks may be redundant to the amenities in other, more accessible spaces.

*Please provide insight on the following range of issues (comment on all that apply to your expertise):*

- *Circulation and Civic Connectivity*
  - *In order to invite pedestrians, the arcades should be perceived as extensions of the surrounding streetscapes. This could be achieved by using a consistent palette of materials and furnishings.*
  - *The proposed grade change between the St Paul arcade and the adjacent streets creates a visual separation that may limit the sense of connectivity at Cherry and Bank Streets. Can this arcade be graded to meet the edges without stairs? If not, how will ADA accessibility be achieved?*

- The double doors at the arcade entrances may be perceived as unwelcoming to pedestrian exploring the city. The design team should explore an option in which the arcades can be open-air during the warmer months.
- The current design of the Pine Street vehicle connection is largely driven by the constraints of the parking garage with multiple grade breaks and horizontal shifts. In particular, the northern entrance is staggered from the road alignment. We question if this route will be perceived and used as a public thoroughway, or simply the garage access. How will it feel to ride a bicycle through this space? Is there a way to bring bikes through the arcade instead or separate the bikes from the cars more?
- Activation of public streets
  - Ground floor uses along Bank Street should build on the dining-oriented character of the street. The proposed section along Bank Street includes a 23'-wide sidewalk. If this space includes outdoor dining, we would recommend a 28'-wide section: 4' of planting, 10' of sidewalk, and 14' of dining to allow for two rows of tables. The solar orientation of this edge is ideal for outdoor dining and planting. The design should maximize both.
  - The NBT Bank – given its historical significance – will remain along Bank Street. Can the existing surface parking at the bank be accommodated in the proposed garage to allow more pedestrian space around the building? If not, can the space be redesigned to appear less vehicle-oriented?
  - Cherry Street is currently unwelcoming due to the lack of building program and the constant bus activity along the street. The proposal will add two residential entrances and a large retail entrance between St. Paul and the Macy's parcel. The proposed sidewalk cross-section – a 10' sidewalk, an 8' green strip, an 8' bike path, and a 4' tree zone – appears cluttered and disjointed. Is it possible to cluster the bike parking against the building and open the center for circulation? It would be helpful to see a diagram of how the bike path will connect to broader bike routes through the city. Trees and other plantings on this street will be a challenge given the shade that will be cast by the development and the wind from the lake.
- Site plan / open space design and amenity
  - Access to roof
    - As it is designed now, the roof terrace will be hard to find from adjacent public spaces. The clearest connection is to Bank Street, a minor street with limited foot traffic. The design does not draw pedestrians from Church Street to the roof. The internal connection – at the St. Paul arcade – needs to be grand and open. ADA access to the roof is unclear.
    - We question if this space will be perceived as a public space. In addition to visibility, the management of the space will inform the sense of public ownership. For example, during the open house a resident asked if



people experiencing homelessness will be allowed to use the space. If not, this may be contentious among Burlingtonians. If so, will it be seen as an unsafe space? The resident acknowledged the challenge of managing these contradicting issues.

- The upper green spaces are even further removed from the public realm. These seem to be amenities for the building tenants, rather than public spaces.
- Design of rooftop park
  - The main public space is approximately 120' x 160'. The passive park uses shown in the renderings – lawns, sculpture, park benches, etc. – may not feel appropriate at this scale. For reference, City Hall Plaza is twice the size of the roof park (240'x400').
  - We would recommend making this space feel more like an urban plaza that invites daily use from tenants and city residents. This type of space would include movable seating, open areas for temporary programming, and signature design elements to make the space memorable. The Highline is a valuable precedent for this blend of flexible space and iconic detailing. Additionally, the plaza could incorporate features that encourage year-round use such as a fire pit for the winter and a sculptural water feature for the summer. The terrace at the Hotel Vermont has a successful fire element that may serve as a precedent.
  - Rooftop planting is challenging structurally and introduces significant costs. We believe the value of lawns and trees on the roof – which will struggle to survive in the growing conditions – does not justify the considerable cost. Instead, we would recommend a plaza condition with planters. Planters can be designed to sit above the roof deck and offer a seating at their edges.
  - The intent is to locate dining along the edges of the green space to encourage outdoor dining. The current layout does not seem to accommodate the footprint of this outdoor program. Again, this suggests that this space should be more of a plaza.
  - The renderings of the space do not show seating oriented toward the lake views.
  - As mentioned above, we believe it will be critical to encourage year-round use of the space. Further study of the roof-deck's microclimate will be critical.
- Views

- The southern lake view from the roof park is foregrounded by back-of-house activities on Bank Street. The design should incorporate architectural elements that will frame the view, eliminating views of rooftops and fire escapes below.
- Views to the west appear to be blocked by Macy's mechanical penthouse and the hotels along Battery. Additionally, the height of future development on these parcels is unknown. The design materials should not suggest there will be lake views to the west.
- Type and public value of civic spaces
  - From a systems perspective, small pocket parks, like the roof park, are not a critical amenity for the City. City Hall Plaza, Battery Park, Waterfront Park and Church Street meet similar demands (passive uses, views to the lake, outdoor dining) and are within a 10 minutes' walk from the site.

What are the **positive impacts** likely to accrue to the City if this plan were to be developed?

Housing in downtown

- The renovated mall will be a regional destination and the proposed Target will meet a local demand. Ideally, visitors to the park will explore the City and infuse money into the local economy. The design of the mall should be porous, encouraging visitors to explore the surrounding city.
- The arcades and Pine Street thoroughway will improve vehicle and pedestrian circulation in this part of downtown. Activity along Cherry and Bank Streets has the potential to increase greatly – similar to cross-streets further south.
- The current mall is inward facing. The proposal adds programming along the surrounding streets. This programming has the potential to add vitality to the district.

What design and programming **elements can be improved** and how? Please list and explain.

- The roof garden: Increase visual connection and access to the space from the surrounding streets. Consider how pedestrians can be drawn from Church Street. Make the design more active and flexible by reducing lawns.
- The arcades: More connectivity to Cherry and Bank Streets through visual connections and consistent material palette.

Based upon your professional training and experience, what are the **most critical public amenities** provided by the proposed project and why. Please list in order of importance to the City.

- Pedestrian connections through arcades
- Public programming (farmers' markets) in the arcades
- Inviting public streetscapes on Cherry and Bank Streets

If there are amenities that you feel **do not warrant public investment** please highlight and explain why.

- As it is designed currently, the rooftop green spaces are duplicative of existing public amenities nearby. Before investing in this element, the City should understand how – and by whom – the space will be managed and programmed.

Please provide comments, feedback and or recommendations on the **project's phasing** for the City to consider moving forward.

DRAFT

*Technical Team Review – Goody Clancy draft*

**MEMO**

TO: CEDO & Planning Departments  
FROM: David Spillane, Goody Clancy  
DATE: May 26, 2015  
RE: Technical Team Peer Review – BTC Redevelopment

**INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND:**

Goody Clancy is an architecture, planning and preservation firm based in Boston and working nationally. Our work focuses on assisting our clients and their communities to create plans and places that provide economic, social and environmental value. We have worked with many communities on design and development review of urban projects, including Providence's Capitol Center, where we have served as the Capitol Center's Design Advisor over the last 10 years.

**QUESTIONS:**

*What is your overall assessment of Devonwood's proposed plan to redevelop the BTC in light of PlanBTV and other identified municipal planning goals?*

Devonwood's proposed plan to redevelop BTC is an exciting and ambitious initiative that has the potential to have a profoundly positive impact on downtown Burlington, advancing many of the goals of PlanBTV. Key opportunities associated with BTC redevelopment include:

- **incorporate a mix of uses that would contribute new life and activity to Burlington's core**, providing opportunities for downtown living, together with expansion of both office and retail space—accommodating both national and local retailers.
- **strengthen the overall functioning of downtown by restoring and enhancing connections within the downtown**, especially along Pine Street and St Paul's Street, that were eliminated or degraded as part of the original mall construction.
- **enhance the character and vitality of Cherry Street and Bank Street**, which lack vitality and active street level uses.

Through continued development of its design concept, the project has the potential to evolve into an even stronger component of Burlington's downtown landscape.

*Please provide insight on the following range of issues (comment on all that apply to your expertise):*

- *circulation and civic connectivity*
  - **The key improvements included in the BTC design are the new connection across the property at St Paul's Street and the enhancement to the existing connection across the property at Pine Street.** Both connections provide significant improvements over current conditions and enhance connectivity across the site and within the downtown, a key public goal. Both of these connections, as currently designed, however, will be perceived as providing public access across private property, not truly public connections available without restriction on a 24/7 basis. Each connection involves entering the building, passing through the retail arcade and atrium (and related building security), and exiting through doors at the other end. Potential improvements that might enhance the sense of these connections as true public spaces would include providing a true outdoor route that does not involve entering a building and is fully open to the sky, or alternatively an outdoor route that includes weather protection in the form of a canopy. The approach might be varied at each connection point, with the goal of establishing at least one connection that feels truly public. To the extent possible, connections should be as direct as possible providing clear sightlines across the property, not offset, and align directly with the existing street corridor beyond the property.
- *activation of public streets*
  - **The proposed design includes significant activation of Cherry Street replacing the existing parking garage with an active streetscape of storefronts and building entrances.** There are some inconsistencies in the drawings related to the number and extent of storefront entrances (more entrances shown on elevations than plans), and it's somewhat difficult to determine which entrances serve to access office or retail uses and whether residential access is provided. The street level frontage includes an overhang from the office space above and structural columns that interrupt the continuity of storefronts, pushing pedestrian movement away from the building façade and

reducing the true viability of these spaces for small and mid-size retail tenants. Further design development of the ground level, which emphasizes building entrances and removes the interruption caused by structural columns could enrich the ground floor experience and vitality of the street edge. This street edge would be significantly improved by incorporating clearly designed and expressed entrances to residential uses.

- **The proposed retail and office uses that front Bank Street would activate this street, provided appropriate tenants can be secured for the retail spaces.** Currently the mall includes the potential for access to retail from this street edge, but this is not being used by existing tenants.
- *height, massing, and urban design in relation to its downtown location*
  - **The proposed design adds a vital mix of uses and a high-density format that seems appropriate to its downtown setting and established public goals.** While some building elements are taller than surrounding buildings, it appears that these taller elements are generally located to ensure that they do not overshadow existing streets (review of shadow studies is needed).
  - **The strong horizontal emphasis of the building design, particularly along Cherry Street (ground level retail arcade, office floors, residential top), reinforced by various setbacks and the consistency of expression in the Cherry Street façade, appears to emphasize the building's large size relative to its context.** While the building is truly large, additional design development could potentially mitigate its visual impact by reducing the horizontal emphasis in expression, or establishing greater differentiation among building parts, generally enriching the expression of the project and enabling it to integrate more seamlessly with its surroundings. Similar comments, but to a lesser degree, apply to the Bank Street frontage.
  - **The massing of the new building façade along Cherry Street is broadly symmetrical, emphasizing a major entry in the middle of the building form, but does not seek to respond to the surrounding urban landscape.** The massing does little to respond to the surrounding context on Cherry Street and the park-like spaces surrounding the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Efforts to refine building massing and expression so that they were more

responsive to the immediate context, and perhaps gave greater definition to the park surrounding the cathedral would further enhance the BTC project. Could there be less emphasis on symmetry and greater differentiation between the two residential tower elements?

- *mix of land uses (e.g. retail, entertainment, office, housing, public space)*
  - **The mix of land uses incorporated within the development is consistent with public goals and would make a real contribution to downtown's continued vitality.**
- *distribution of housing mix*
  - **The location of housing along Cherry Street seems appropriate.** The design could potentially be strengthened by incorporating more visible entry points to the housing directly from the Cherry Street frontage. This would add life and vitality to this public street without diminishing its retail potential, and is preferable to locating residential entries on the cross streets. Our understanding is that the residential use will be largely rental with a variety of unit types and price points ranging from affordable units to units targeted to students and higher end rentals. Further thought will be needed to determine how to combine and separate these uses to meet market preferences and tenant expectations. Key considerations will include the need for curb-side drop-off, and the extent to which different rental products will need separate entries and vertical access.
- *mix of retail uses (price and national vs local)*
  - **The goal of incorporating a mix of local and national retailers is very positive.** The precise mix will need to be discussed further.
- *type and public value of civic spaces*
  - The new Arcade has the potential to be an attractive civic space within the downtown area, but its primary function is to support retail activity within the development.
  - The connections across the property on St Paul's Street and Pine Street represent the most important potential contributions of the project.
  - Rooftop park space represents a potentially appealing amenity but with limited public value.

What are the **positive impacts** likely to accrue to the City if this plan were to be developed?

- See previous comments related to the benefits of the proposed use mix.

What design and programming **elements can be improved** and how? Please list and explain.

- See previous comments related to St. Paul's Street and Pine Street connections and Cherry Street and Bank Street frontages.

Based upon your professional training and experience, what are the **most critical public amenities** provided by the proposed project and why. Please list in order of importance to the City.

In order of importance, the most critical public amenities/benefits are as follows:

- **#1. Reopening of Pine Street and St Paul's Street corridors as vital and active elements of Burlington's public realm.** These corridors should facilitate movement within the downtown area for people with neither origins nor destination within the BTC project.
- **#2. Creation of an active and vital street edge along Cherry Street, replacing the existing parking structure with active storefronts,** and building entrances serving office retail and residential uses.
- **#3. Creation of an active street edge along Bank Street.** Bank Street's current form allows for incorporation of retail use at ground level, but for the most part such uses have not located here.

If there are amenities that you feel **do not warrant public investment** please highlight and explain why.

- **#1. Rooftop park space is unlikely to warrant public investment.** Rooftop park space could be a potentially attractive amenity serving users and tenants of BTC. The value of such space, however, as a true public amenity is likely to be highly limited and its cost will likely be high. Several larger cities (including San Francisco, Boston and NYC) have experimented with the providing of rooftop public space as an amenity. Most of these spaces have



seen very limited public use and have not fulfilled expectations. In a smaller city such as Burlington with lower density and greater availability of ground level public space, a similar outcome is to be expected, despite the public interest in this concept that Devonwood has heard from the Burlington community—and endeavored to be responsive to.

*Please provide comments, feedback and or recommendations on the **project's phasing** for the City to consider moving forward.*

- The project has the potential to result in significant disruption to the downtown area during its construction period. This topic will need to be the subject of significant future discussions.

## DRAFT Memorandum

TO: Burlington CEDO & Planning Department  
FROM: Lucy Gibson, P.E.  
DATE: 27 May 2015  
RE: Technical Team Peer Review – BTC Redevelopment

### INTRODUCTION

This review is focused on transportation issues, including connectivity, safety and mobility for all modes of travel. I have expertise in traffic and multimodal transportation planning, engineering and design, as outlined in my resume, which has been submitted to the City. Through my work on other City projects I am very familiar with PlanBTV and the transportation-related goals.

### QUESTIONS

*What is your overall assessment of Devonwood's proposed plan to redevelop the BTC in light of PlanBTV and other identified municipal planning goals?*

My overall impression is that the land uses and development densities as proposed are highly compatible with PlanBTV. However, the proposed plan does not meet the goals for connecting street network connectivity set out in the plan. PlanBTV suggests that:

- “An effort should be made to restore street connections wherever possible, including the clipped sections of Pine Street and St. Paul Street.” page 70.
- “Should a complete street retrofit not be an option, having a bicycle and pedestrian connection through the mall would be a welcome improvement to the multimodal transportation system.” page 72.

It was stated at the May 5-6 meetings that a full complete street retrofit is not feasible. The Devonwood plan includes a vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle connection at Pine Street, and a pedestrian connection at St. Paul Street. The vehicle and bicycle connectivity at Pine Street is provided through a parking garage. The design as presented is not safe or functional primarily due to excessive grades, as well as other issues, which is discussed in more detail later in this memo. Therefore, the plan does not address the PlanBTV aspirations for improving connectivity.

### Circulation and Civic Connectivity

**Pedestrian Connectivity.** The pedestrian connectivity is constrained by the existing buildings, grades, and the need for connectivity with the Burlington Arcade. Given these constraints, the pedestrian connections are adequate to meet the connectivity goals; however, the planned operations are critical to the utility and success of the pedestrian connections. The connections should be open 24/7 so that they

become a functional part of the transportation system. If they are not reliably open at all hours and all days of the week, pedestrians will not be as likely to take advantage of the connections, as it is a long detour to either Church or Battery Streets for someone who is seeking to cross but finds the connection closed. My strong recommendation is to have the connections open 24/7, complemented by appropriate lighting and signage to encourage their use. Personal security is another concern, and the more people that are using the connections, the more “eyes on the street” will be present to provide overall safety and security.

**Bicycle Connectivity.** The bicycle connectivity is provided with a two-way bicycle path along the parking garage access. The proposed path design is not reasonable or safe. The issues include the following:

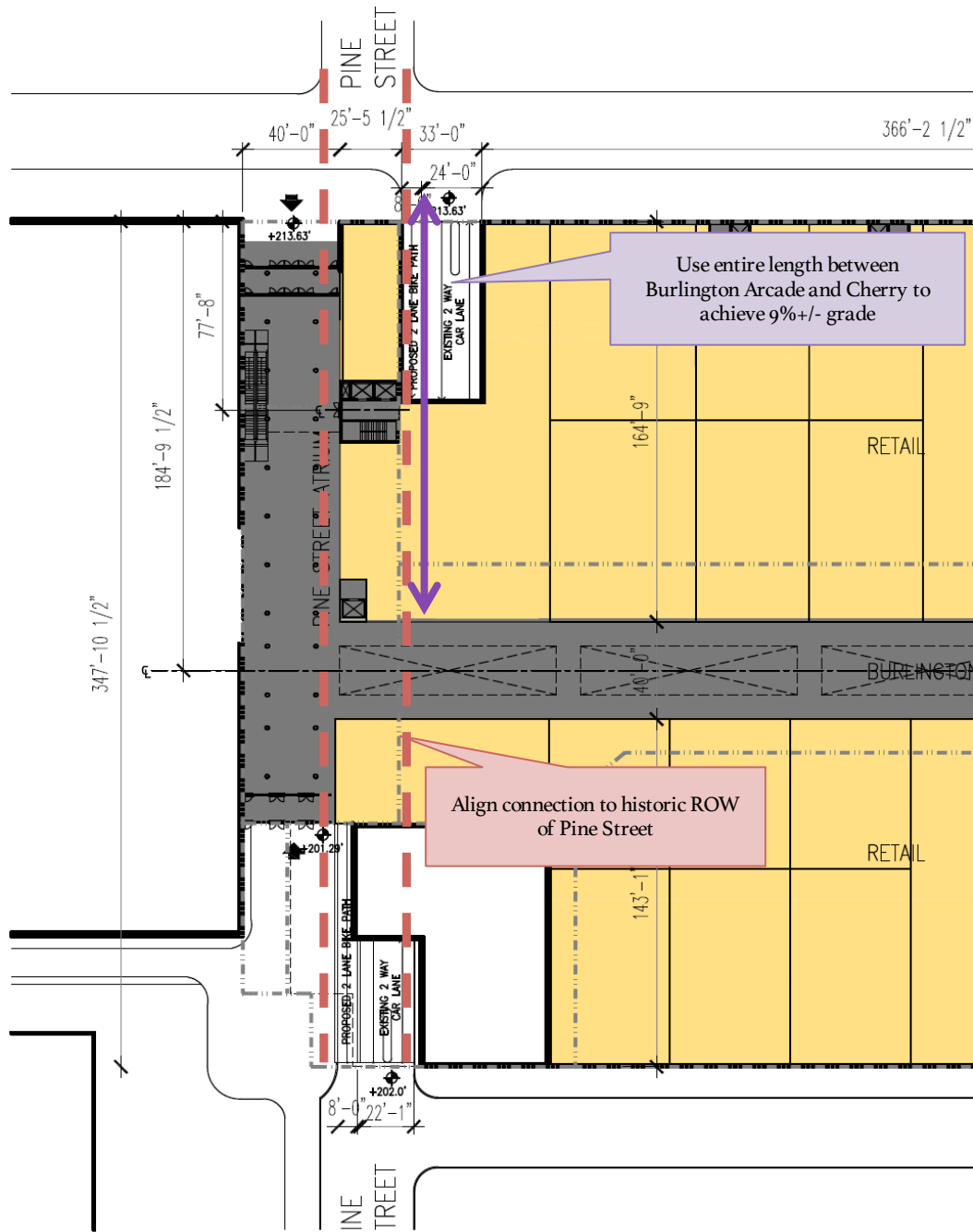
*Grades.* The grade of the path as it approaches Cherry Street is far too steep, even for vehicle access to the garage. The plans show the change in elevation to be 16.67 feet over a length of 73.75 feet, which equate to an average grade of 22.6%. **Simply put, a bicycle facility CANNOT have grades this steep.** In fact, this grade will even form a significant barrier for vehicles seeking to use this as a connector route. Many drivers will not be comfortable on slopes this steep. The issues of pedestrian use of the bicycle path, and ADA requirements also need to be clarified. A final concern of the plan that will likely require a relatively steep grade at the Cherry Street entrance is the safety of pedestrians traveling along Cherry Street. The plan appears to break the sidewalk connectivity along Cherry Street, which is problematic. Steep uphill grades from parking garages as they approach a busy sidewalk are inherently suboptimal; the drivers are throttling up a steep grade with limited visibility of pedestrians, making conflicts between the two likely.

*Width.* The path is proposed to be 8 feet. This is a minimum width for a shared use path or cycle track, with 10 feet being a desirable target. However, additional width is warranted due to the grades and due to the west edge of the path being aligned against a wall. An additional 2.5 feet of width should be provided where a path is parallel to a wall or other obstruction. Further, additional width is needed in sections where there are grades exceeding 5%. The plans do not show the width of the buffer between the path and the vehicular route; nor any details on the type of bollards proposed to separate the path from the vehicular way.

*Alignment.* The path’s route has several kinks which are too abrupt, even for vehicles, put especially for bicyclists who are traveling at a grade. A preferred alignment is to maintain the historic Pine Street right-of-way, which will provide for a much safer and more efficient intersection at Cherry Street.

*Security.* Riding a bicycle path through an underground garage will be daunting to many riders, making the utility of this route and its success in providing a much needed north-south bicycle connection questionable. To make the path as secure as possible, it should be designed to maximize its use for both bicycles and vehicles, so that bicyclists do not find themselves alone on a dark quiet and constrained route. Therefore, both the vehicle and bicycle connectivity should be emphasized in the design.

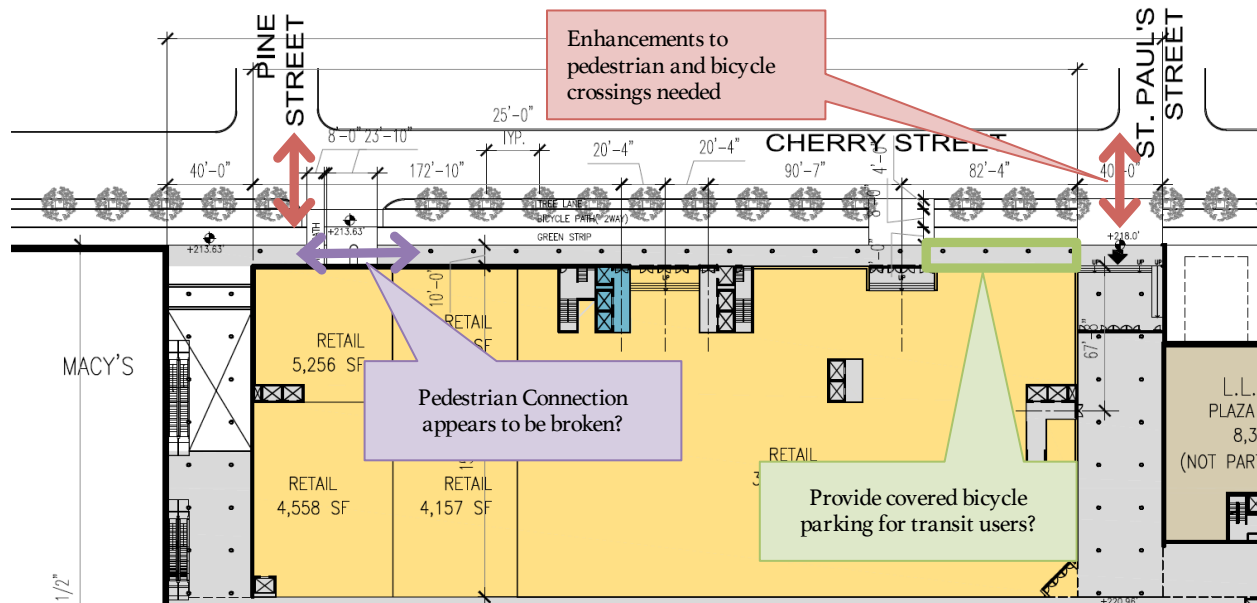
**Recommendations.** The Pine Street connector for bicycles and vehicles is unworkable as proposed, primarily due to the steep grades at Cherry Street. The concept of a bicycle route that essentially follows the historic Pine St right-of-way, and has reasonable grades, would be much more desirable for numerous reasons. Providing a vehicular route along Pine Street is also desirable, but it should have a design that includes reasonable grades.



### Activation of Public Streets

**Cherry St Bicycle Path.** The plan shows a two-way cycle track along the frontage of Cherry Street, which is not consistent with the Burlington Street Design Guidelines, which designate Cherry as a “slow street.” Further, Pearl Street is planned to be the primary east-west bicycle route in this vicinity. The elimination of the bike path on Cherry Street should be eliminated and other options considered, with activation as primary goal. The potential for on-street parking should be considered, given the demand generated by a potential Target store, as well as the multimodal center. Covered bicycle parking could be provided for transit riders accessing the St. Paul transit stops.

**Cherry St Sidewalk.** The plan as shown appears to break the sidewalk continuity on Cherry Street across the parking garage entrance. This will create a huge barrier for walking along this street, impeding its activation.



### Parking approach, supply, management and configuration

**Parking approach and supply.** Because of the challenges in finding sufficient parking for the proposed development program, all efforts should be made to design for lower vehicle usage. Current trends in Burlington suggest that solo driving is declining. The recent expansion of CATMA to become a regional Transportation Management Association provides an opportunity for partnership to reduce solo driving, and parking requirements, for the employment components of the development.

**Parking configuration.** As noted earlier, the grades on the access to the parking garage from Cherry Street are simply not feasible, and the parking garage design and circulation must be completely revisited.

### Orientation/amenity for walking, biking and transit

There are many opportunities to improve the permeability and comfort for people walking, biking or riding transit. For example:

- Provide gutters along the stairs for the St. Paul and Pine Street arcades so that bicyclists can easily walk their bikes up the stairs.
- Provide automatic opening doors at the arcades, and possibly retractable doors for fair weather.
- Provide safe crossings of Cherry Street for access to the transit center.
- Provide covered bicycle parking under the Cherry Street arcade roof for transit users.

*What are the **positive impacts** likely to accrue to the City if this plan were to be developed?*

The plan as currently submitted does not provide for safe and adequate connectivity.

*What design and programming **elements can be improved** and how? Please list and explain.*

- 1) 24/7 access to all bicycle, pedestrian and vehicular connections, with appropriate lighting and wayfinding.

- 2) Realign connection at Pine Street in a straight line along the historic right-of-way and provide reasonable grades not to exceed 10%.
- 3) Provide for a continuous sidewalk along the south side of Cherry Street, and provide a safe intersection with reasonable grades where the parking garage/Pine St connector crosses the sidewalk. Provide safe enhanced crossings for bicycles and pedestrians at Pine/Cherry, and for pedestrians at St. Paul. Provide bicycle parking facility under cover along Cherry near St. Paul for transit users.

*Based upon your professional training and experience, what are the **most critical public amenities** provided by the proposed project and why. Please list in order of importance to the City.*

The proposed connectivity for all modes of travel will be highly beneficial and healing to the city's multimodal transportation network.

The design of the intersections and crossings is also critical, particularly for Cherry Street because of the transit center's proximity.

*If there are amenities that you feel **do not warrant public investment** please highlight and explain why.*

The bicycle and vehicle connections as proposed for Pine Street are not safe or adequate, and do not warrant public investment until they are redesigned to have reasonable grades and a safe intersection at Cherry Street.

*Please provide comments, feedback and or recommendations on the **project's phasing** for the City to consider moving forward.*

No comments at this time.

## *Burlington Town Center Redevelopment Technical Review*

### MEMO

TO: CEDO & Planning Departments  
FROM: Julie Campoli  
DATE: May 28, 2015  
RE: Technical Team Peer Review – BTC Redevelopment

#### *INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND:*

*Please provide a quick overview of your professional background as well as a brief description of your firm – and how your experience and expertise can assist with this peer review.*

I am an [urban designer and author](#) who has spent the last 25 years exploring, photographing, designing and writing about urban places. My books include *Visualizing Density*, which has been used widely by academics as a primer on density, and by design professionals, and public officials to address public concerns about density and infill. My latest book, *Made for Walking*, required field work in over 50 North American neighborhoods to investigate and illustrate the types of urban form that make walking and sustainable transportation possible.

A key aspect of my work has been to help people understand the relationship between design concepts and actual urban environments. I conduct workshops and lecture throughout the U.S. and Canada on the topics of walkability, density, housing, sustainable transportation, and green infrastructure.

I'm a long-time Burlington resident and have observed decades of change in the city. My practice, Terra Firma Design, specializes in urban design, visualization, public engagement and site planning for affordable housing, emphasizing the infilling of existing neighborhoods. As a consultant to Vermont non-profits, state agencies, and municipalities, I have helped steer development toward a more efficient and contextual pattern.

#### *QUESTIONS:*

*What is your overall assessment of Devonwood's proposed plan to redevelop the BTC in light of PlanBTV and other identified municipal planning goals?*

In my reading of Plan BTV, the most critical goals for the BTC mall property are: 1) to maximize the use of this land in the heart of downtown, specifically by tapping unused upper story space for moderate-priced housing, 2) to restore long-severed connections between

northern and southern areas of the city, and 3) to restore pedestrian activity along Bank and Cherry Streets. (Pp. 96-7)

The proposed plan achieves the first goal in that it takes advantage of unused air space, adding housing above the shopping levels. I won't comment on the affordability of the housing but the addition of other uses to broaden the mix on the site achieves an overarching goal of intensifying activity on this key parcel.

The proposal brings the City closer to achieving the second goal of making north-south connections, but it could be redesigned to restore the urban grid in a more robust and permanent way, which I will detail below. The project proposes a layout and uses that will activate Bank and Cherry Streets, but some design changes are recommended to fully engage pedestrians along those corridors.

The proposed design offers many other public benefits such as more retail options, a better shopping experience, a more coherent circulation system, a rooftop park, interior gathering spaces, landscaped streets, and more effective storm water management. Some of these features are included in Plan BTV's vision for the downtown and waterfront district, but the Plan does not cite these as goals for the mall property.

*Please provide insight on the following range of issues (comment on all that apply to your expertise):*

*Circulation and civic connectivity*

The proposal represents a clear improvement in circulation within and through the site. It straightens the central east-west corridor creating a direct sight line and more legible pathway from the mall entrance on Church Street to its terminus at Macy's. Currently, crossing the mall between Bank and Cherry Streets requires changing direction and moving between floors. The proposed design creates a straight connection between north and south by opening a corridor along St. Paul, and apparently along Pine, although Plan A-103 and View 11 do not make the link with Bank entirely clear.

While the design represents an improvement over existing *circulation* patterns, it doesn't fully realize the potential *civic connectivity* possible through redevelopment of the site. At issue is legal control over these vital corridors. As proposed, the St. Paul and Pine links would be enclosed, interior hallways (arcades) and would by nature function as privately owned public spaces (POPOS). Although the public would be allowed to use them, the terms of that use, as well as access through the site, would be controlled by mall owners and determined by an agreement with the City.



The benefit of the proposed arcades (and POPOS in general) is that the public gains access to gathering space, which would be maintained by a private entity at little or no cost to the city. But that access must be negotiated, will be limited, and is subject to agreements that, if not consistently updated or enforced, may not serve the public's interests in future. POPOS can be any type of space (lobbies, courtyards, plazas, gardens) but the control issue is most problematic when it comprises a key connection between destinations. Design of these corridors will affect their function as well as their perceived accessibility. If there are no doors and open to the air, it will feel more public. If the corridor walls consist of building facades, it will feel like more like a traditional street and less like a mall interior, sending cues to non-shoppers that St. Paul or Pine are public thoroughfares between Cherry and Bank Streets. With a two-level mall, it is possible to provide a climate-controlled connection on the lower level for those who prefer it.

A generation ago, the City abandoned St. Paul and Pine Streets and has since learned a hard lesson about the value of an interconnected street grid. The mall redevelopment presents an opportunity to regain public control of these vital connections by restoring (at a minimum) an open-air corridor that provides 24/7 access, or (preferably) re-established public rights-of-way.

One example of an urban mall that spans two blocks, yet accommodates public rights-of-way is the recently constructed City Creek Center Mall in Salt Lake City. Shoppers move across the bisecting street on the upper level in an enclosed skyway, or on the ground level across a traffic-calmed street. (See attached photos)

This approach would meet the goal of "restoring connectivity of the urban grid" clearly stated in Plan BTV, which advocates reopening St. Paul and Pine as complete streets, or at least as pedestrian/bike streets (p. 99). In fact, it directs planners to undertake this effort as the mall is redeveloped. Its emphasis on traditional streets, rather than enclosed arcades, implies that exterior, rather than interior space is the preferred form for these connections. Although recent public process revealed a desire for heated space during the winter months, in my opinion, these vital corridors are not the best location for it because they prevent the space from becoming truly public.

The Plan BTV approach to reconstructing St. Paul and Pine would likely maintain a traditional street profile, with generous sidewalks and central bike lanes within the 40' wide space and a highly articulated crosswalk at the Burlington Arcade intersection.

Another circulation issue concerns access to the rooftop park. Although the location of the park has been defined, routes from the surrounding streets to the park are not delineated. This is not a small detail to be resolved at the end of the process but should be an integral part of the overall circulation network. If the rooftop park is an amenity for the people of Burlington, as the proposal states, the public must be aware of it and made to feel welcome—a substantial design challenge, given its remote location. Making it visible from

the street, as shown in the plan, will help, but the path from street to roof must be carefully planned as a sequence of spaces with visual cues rather than signs, leading visitors to the roof.

### *Activation of public streets*

The proposed plan helps activate the surrounding streets by replacing blank walls with storefronts and other destinations. Narrow retail frontages on the Bank Street side of the project will animate that street wall and help bring more foot traffic to block. Removing the parking garage from its current location on Cherry Street and infilling retail along the north side of the mall will make a huge aesthetic impact, helping transform the street from the service alley it resembles today to a more inviting avenue. Swapping parking space for stores will create more reasons to visit the block.

Although it will improve, Cherry St. probably won't become as active as other downtown streets. Closely spaced building entrances and transparent ground level facades are key components of walkable streets, giving pedestrians opportunities to see and engage in activities within buildings. The plan shows only three retail entrances and one residential entrance along a length of 380', which has no retail on the other side of the street to draw people. Visitors to Target might be the heaviest users of the garage, and may typically gain access to the building without stepping onto Cherry. To overcome these challenges, it's crucial that the design create an engaging and transparent façade along this block, even though the large retailer will most likely not require (or even desire) display windows.

One architectural feature of the proposed plan that detracts from its ability to engage pedestrians is the setback and overhang along the Bank and Cherry Street facades (V-07, V-09). In our cold dark winters this recessed area adds no real benefit and can be a gloomy no man's land. (See attached photos) As noted above, successfully designed pedestrian streets visually "invite" passersby into ground floor interiors with frequent entrances and large display windows. People on the sidewalk get a glimpse of what's going on inside shops and restaurants, which peaks their curiosity and interest. This delicate interplay depends on an intimate distance between the sidewalk and shop windows, which is why the most successful, best-loved shopping streets in Burlington (Church, College, Bank) have no setbacks. Shop windows are adjacent to the sidewalk pathway, on the same plane as upper stories. Awnings provide canopies when needed but create no interference along the sidewalk. There is no setback between pedestrians and display windows. Arcades offer the promise of protection from the elements which is why they were included in the original design for the Church Street Marketplace. But in reality, they can interfere with the pedestrian retail experience. It's worth noting that the Church St. arcade has been dismantled over the past decades, eliminating the overhang and creating a more direct connection between shoppers and storefronts.

### *Height, massing, and urban design in relation to its downtown location*

The proposed plan fits comfortably within the site. Most upper stories are set back and will not loom over the street or surrounding buildings. One major exception is the office tower that protrudes over St. Paul St. (V-02, V-03). This should be relocated to the west so that the street corridor has no overhead obstructions and is open to the sky.

On this subject my concern is whether there is *enough* building—whether this development plan takes full advantage of its prime downtown location. Few Burlington parcels are more suited to high density than this one. The developer is likely sensitive to public concerns about density and reluctant to push this issue, but from a public policy perspective, the project may be falling short of its potential. I suggest exploring the possibility of adding more units of housing to better address the city's critical need.

Upper stories along Bank St. might be given over to moderately priced housing rather than dedicated to the roof park, which I don't believe provides enough public value to justify City investment (more below). Alternatively, the roof park could sit a few stories up above more housing. The strategy of placing the roof park on a lower level to make a visual connection with pedestrians on the street makes sense, but it may not be worth the tradeoff. The number one goal of Plan BTV for this parcel is moderately priced housing. While there may have been mention of green space in public meetings, it is not a stated goal of the adopted plan.

### *Site plan / open space design and amenity*

The proposal contains a generous amount of green space in the form of a rooftop park, which has been carefully located and arranged to draw the public in, provide a variety of green spaces, create an amenity for residents and office workers, and provide some environmental benefits. Rooftop landscapes are a great idea, but in practice, [they create two substantial challenges](#). The first is cost. Growing plants on roofs, where conditions are more extreme (heavy wind, thin soil, hot sun) is technically difficult. It requires far more resources to build and maintain a rooftop landscape than a ground-level park. Web research yields many rooftop plans and renderings but few built examples. The successful ones exist in high value locations (High Line and River Bank State Park, Manhattan, St. Mary's Square, San Francisco). Given the technical challenges, failure is common, requiring complete renovation (Kiley Gardens in Tampa). In other cases rooftop parks are planned but not realized due to their high cost (Transbay Transit Center, San Francisco).

The second challenge is accessibility, which raises doubts about a rooftop park's value as a public amenity. Pedestrians on Bank Street will see the park if they look up, but otherwise it will not be visible from public pathways. Serendipitous visits by the public will be hard to

achieve. People are not accustomed to entering a building and ascending floors to have an outdoor experience. Programming events will help increase use by the public, but it will most often be enjoyed by the office workers and residents who see it every day rather than visitors wandering up from the street.

Unlike the St. Paul and Pine St. corridors, which could possibly become public rights-of-way, the rooftop park will be privately owned (POPOS), with rules for public access and use determined by the owner through negotiations with the City. Key items to be resolved are: hours of operation, allowed behaviors, program policies, maintenance responsibilities and level of care, enforcement, signage, etc. The rooftop park will require specialized maintenance. If the City invests in it as a public amenity, it should be confident this public space will be in good shape thirty years from now, despite changes in operation or ownership.

POPOS have been around since the 1980s. In the early years, many did not fulfill the goal of providing public benefit. As a result cities have developed [policies and regulations for the design and use](#) to ensure that they function more like public spaces and less like private enclaves. Since POPOS are a relatively new phenomenon in Burlington, it would be helpful to review these policies if the City partners with BTC to create the roof park (and Pine and St. Paul arcades). It can benefit from the past mistakes and best practices of other cities in this rather complex area of open space design.

The challenges of cost and accessibility lead me to question whether the rooftop park will provide enough public benefit to justify an investment by the City or the tradeoff of buildable space on the third and fourth floors. It would be nice to have more green space downtown but is it a critical need, and if so, would this green space meet that need, given its remote location? A site visit revealed that views of Lake Champlain are constrained by existing buildings and would not provide a vantage point significantly better than other downtown locations.

Developing the mall's roof as green space is a good idea, which should be pursued. It can help absorb storm water and modify summer temperatures, as well as provide functional outdoor space and a visual landscape for residents and office tenants as a roof garden. But it may not be worth an investment by the City for its use as a park.

### *Orientation/amenity for walking, biking and transit*

In general the plan supports active travel options, adding a north-south bike link. It prioritizes pedestrian access to the building and makes it easier to cross the property on foot. The closely spaced street trees shown on the plan will provide a comfortable street environment and should certainly be included in the final project. Other streetscape amenities like

benches, landscaping and bike racks are visible in renderings but not located on this early version of the site plan.

One detail however, is not pedestrian friendly. The sidewalk profile along Cherry St. shows a tree lane, a 2-way bicycle path, and a green strip, but no sidewalk labeled. It appears from the renderings that the sidewalk is under the overhang (A-104). This restricts pedestrians to a relatively narrow space, bisected by columns, difficult to maneuver in a wheelchair or with a stroller, and dead-ending at a wall (Macy's on Cherry and the office building on Bank). Pedestrians can't walk in the sunshine or in a space open to the sky and, given this scenario, would likely claim the bike lanes to enjoy a more direct and commodious route. The City may be developing its own profile for Cherry Street (perhaps this is an early version) but it needs to include more and unobstructed space for pedestrians than what is shown in this proposal.

The protected bike lane through the garage on Pine St. provides a much-needed link between Bank and Cherry streets. The design avoids conflicts between cyclists and turning vehicles. Future plans should show that any tollbooths would not present barriers. This link is an improvement on current conditions and will work for a certain type of trip- a quick and direct way to get across town, but it is not ideal. Underground garages are not pleasant places to be in a car and are even less appealing on a bike. If the St. Paul and Pine corridors were open to the air, and bike-friendly (as described above), cyclists would have a more attractive route. They would intersect, rather than bypass the Burlington Arcade, and be more likely to stop, enter that space and enjoy it. If the City chooses not to restore these corridors as public thoroughfares and they become arcades as proposed, it is crucial that at people be allowed to walk through the space with their bikes to provide alternatives to the underground route.

In terms of orientation, the building's design should reinforce the perception of a restored urban grid by treating the facades at these locations as corner buildings. In the case of the office tower noted above, it should respect the setback line established by neighboring buildings and not hang over St. Paul.

#### *Mix of land uses (e.g. retail, entertainment, office, housing, public space)*

The distribution of land uses makes sense. Given its location adjacent to Church Street and its history as a shopping center, lining this block with retail and restaurant uses at the street level is quite appropriate. The addition of a Target or similar store selling practical, affordable items would be a great benefit to Burlington residents. Narrow shop frontages along Cherry and Bank will help activate those streets as well as add more retail options. The proposed development will add a lot of activity to downtown, inviting businesses with new retail and office space, and offering jobs and services to residents. This, combined with the new housing, will create the type of proximity that will make Burlington become a more livable, walkable place.

*What are the **positive impacts** likely to accrue to the City if this plan were to be developed?*

Summary of ideas detailed above:

- Provide convenience and choice to Burlington residents and allowing them to make more trips on foot
- Gain sorely needed housing, in a choice location, offering residents convenience and transportation savings, while providing customers to downtown businesses.
- Make downtown safer by increasing the number of eyes on the street in during non-business hours.
- Re-establish north / south connections through downtown
- Activate Cherry and Bank Streets, especially removing the parking garage.
- Increase the range and number of retail services and office spaces downtown
- Contribute to the city skyline

*What design and programming **elements can be improved** and how? Please list and explain.*

Summary of ideas detailed above:

- Eliminate enclosed POPOS arcades, restore public rights-of-way along St. Paul and Pine Streets, assigning control to the city and designing these corridors as open air, street like thoroughfares lined with exterior building facades and open to pedestrians and bicyclists,
- Add more housing units
- Move the office tower to the east so as not to protrude over St. Paul.
- Eliminate the arcade/colonnade along Bank and Cherry St. façade.
- Allow more space for pedestrians along Cherry St. than depicted in the site plan.
- If POPOS (roof park, arcades) are approved for the site, the City should clearly establish the public's right to use those spaces through detailed legal contracts and be prepared to enforce them in the future.

*Based upon your professional training and experience, what are the **most critical public amenities** provided by the proposed project and why. Please list in order of importance to the City.*

- housing

- direct connections between north and south

*If there are amenities that you feel **do not warrant public investment** please highlight and explain why.*

Explanations provided above

- rooftop park
- interior arcades

DRAFT



Images referenced above:

City Creek Mall, Salt Lake City, UT

How a two block-long mall can accommodate an urban grid.





Mall / street interface: upper level interior walkway, street level crossing



Examples of Burlington buildings with ground level setbacks and overhangs

